

6/14/12 Action Plan

My name is Stuart Harry Hersh, and like most in Austin I rent. I am here in my role as vice-chair of the CHDO Roundtable, a coalition of not-for-profit organizations that build, rehabilitate and repair housing in Austin that is affordable, safe, decent, accessible and close to public transportation.

I am asking you to adopt the CHDO Roundtable's Framework for An Opportunity-Rich Siting Policy for Affordable Housing in Austin, Texas as part of the Action Plan this year. This document provides recommendations for Council action in a year when federal investment in housing affordability is declining dramatically and we strive to make it possible for the poorest among us to live in more neighborhoods all around Austin.

I thank you for your action earlier this morning on reviewers and inspectors, and hope that this will result in the restoration of fast track review and inspection for S.M.A.R.T. Housing when the City manager presents the draft budget later this summer.

I don't have to tell any of you that housing affordability is a critical moral issue in a year when you receive an Action Plan for the first time in the 21st Century that has no commitment to local funding. It is a moral issue when those performing essential jobs in Austin have to continue to choose between housing they can afford and housing that is safe.

We may be losing our competitive advantage to other states and other cities in Texas when housing is not available for employees of businesses that are already here or those considering moving here.

This issue is more local than it has been in the past because of bipartisan federal disinvestment in housing. Yet the Action Plan before you contains no local funding. So I ask you to do a couple of things:

1. Use local finds to address the budget gap for NHCD identified by the Budget Office when you take up the City budget.
2. Ask voters to approve \$110,000,000 in housing bonds this November as recommended unanimously by the Housing Committee of the Bond Task Force.
3. Maintain the vibrant Austin Housing Repair Coalition's work by creating transitional funding while bond elections and possible bond sales wind their way through the process.
4. Carry forward the unspent Holly Good Neighborhood funds to make housing safer in East Austin.
5. Embrace entitlement tools that don't cost money and are recommended by the CHDO Roundtable.
6. Move S.M.A.R.T. Housing and home repair permits and inspections to the top-of-the-pile once again so that all City departments are aligned through the budget process with your and our housing affordability goals.

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